THE GENIAL IDIOT

ON ADVERTISING IN PUBLIC PLACES

BY JOHN KENDRICK BANGS

"I SEE," said the Idiot, as he turned from a perusal of his morning paper, to the steaming platter of buckwheats before him, "that they are having a grand old row in New York over the advertising signs in the subway. An eminent citizen suggests that the public kick them to pieces whenever they encounter them, forgetting apparently that placed as they are some eight or ten feet above the level of the platform that the effort he suggests, particularly in the case of ladies who are not professional ballet dancers, would savor of disorderly conduct."

"Well, they ought to be kicked to pieces just the same," said the Bibliomaniac. "They are an outrage not only upon art but upon morals. Every blessed one of them is only the outward and visible sign of that hidden graft by which the public purse is annually milked to the tune of millions."

"Hooray for art!" cried the Idiot. "A bas le graft! as they say in Paris. I agree with you for once, Mr. Bib. The subway being a public utility, should not be debased to the level of a sordid commercial enterprise any more than our parks and public squares should be devoted to the exploitation of patent medicines, hair tonics, breakfast foods and life-giving soups. What would we think of a park commission that permitted the trees of the people's playground to be hung with placards advising the public to keep their teeth white with Mother of Pearline, to shine their shoes with Anthracite Polish and to feed their stomachs at breakfast with An-G-H—short for Christian Science barley, which, by giving the digestive organs of the consumer absent treatment, is more easily assimilated than real food? Most assuredly we would not tolerate that any more than we would permit this same commission to disfigure the park lawns with bill posters exploiting the peculiar virtues of a new kind of suspender, or a patent non-loseable collar button, or a new straight front garment for gentlemen on the verge of over-corpulence. We'd stamp those things out of existence in a minute and the man who permitted them would be Pariah in the land. So with other public property under which classification the New York subway comes, and other subways throughout the country will also come when they are built. The people's property may not be turned to private profit with impunity."

"Oh, nonsense," said the Lawyer. "This whole hue and cry is rot. The public hasn't got anything to say about it."

"Tutt, Mr. Brief," retorted the Idiot. "That observation is erroneous on the face of it. The public is already saying a great deal about it which is a complete disproof of your contention. I maintain that these tenants of the subway have no more right to devote the wall space of those stations to advertising than the president of the United States would have to adorn the wall of the White House interior with decorative designs calling upon visitors to use Russian laundry soap, or Dreamaline for the Nerves, or the Sixteen Hairyland Sisters' Tonic as a cure for baldness. A man may be a tenant of public property, but that does not give him the right to disfigure it."

"Well, my friend," laughed the Lawyer, "this is a utilitarian age. Nothing goes to waste in these times. In all our industries you will find that stuff that used to be thrown away as valueless is now turned into by-products which oftener than not make possible profits when otherwise the business would be run at a loss."

"Granted," said the Idiot. "But what of it?"

"Only this, that as long as there is any available space anywhere that is not used for anything, in other words is wasted," said the Lawyer, "the fertile mind of the American is going to find a use to which it may be put. That's all—and you can't stop him."

"We agree perfectly as to that," said the Idiot. "But the question is not as you see it—as to whether the waste spaces are to be used, but as to what they are to be used for. Public property should be used for the public benefit and there are various uses to which the walls of the subway stations can be put which will be of positive advantage to the public welfare. For instance, one of the glories of France is the Gallery of the Louvre and the Palace of the Luvembourg where the government maintains collections of are objects which have been mainly instrumental in bringing to the French people their knowledge and appreciation of what is beautiful. Now, what better could New York or Boston or any other place that is blessed with a subway do than turn all their subway wall space to some such account as that? From Harlem to the Battery is wall space enough in New York's tube to hold all the Rubens, Raffaels, Michael Angelos, Tintorettos, Botticellis, and other old masters in creation. There are enough niches scattered between cracks and between the supporting columns, by which the city is kept from caving in, to furnish standing room for about all the ennobling sculpture the world has ever known, and which the people could only acquire through the public purse, the value of these treasures being too great for the resources of the ordinary man—"

"In other words you would turn the subway into an art gallery?" sneered the Lawyer.

"It could be done," said the Idiot. "And it would have a far-reaching effect. Daily contact with such things would elevate the public taste and gradually this high ideal of art would penetrate every branch of the city's service. Moreover, if anybody were to complain that the air of the subway was bad, what a withering retort it would be for the officials to say, 'Ah, yes—but what an artistic atmosphere.'"

Mr. Brief laughed. "I guess the American people are too busy for the acquisition of any such uplift as that. You could see a lot of those pictures from an express couldn't you?"

"Yes," said the Idiot. "That is, you would be conscious of a whirr of art even if you didn't quite catch any single painting in detail, and I mantain that a whirr of art that amounts only to a blur nine miles long is better than no art at all such as you find in a picture of a Face Powder Laureatee or of an advertisement for O'Brien's Rubber Necks to Keep the Weight of Your Brains Off Your Spine. Still I must admit that there are more direct ways of improving the public than through the delicate intimations of a beautiful picture. For many years I have wondered why our Theatrical Managers and Opera Impressarios did not utilize the curtain space for the educational advantage of the patrons of the theatre or opera house. If I had my way at the Metropolitan opera house I would have painted on the drop curtain a lot of Hints on Behavior for the Audience. Do not whistle during pianissimo movements. In accompanying the Prima Donna in her arias gentlemen with basso voices will please not hum off the key. When you go out between the Acts walk on your own feet and not upon the feet of persons sitting alongside of you. Box-holders with shrill voices will please not converse above a whisper save at fortissimo periods in the music—and so on. If Mr. Conreid would print a few suggestions like that on his curtain in letter a foot high so that everybody could see them I am sure the public at large would be a great gainer through its moral effect upon the thoughtless and apparently unsuppressible individual!"

"At least I agree with you after many years of disagreement," said the Bibliomaniac. "You really have lucid intervals, do you not?"

"Oh, well we all have," smiled the Idiot amiably. "We can't keep an occasional interval from breaking loose, and I have distinct recollections of your having had one back in 1893—or was it '85, Doctor?"

"Tush!" said the Bibliomanias.

"But to return to our discussion, that's a thing they might do on those wall spaces of the Subway," said the Idiot. "There's room enough to spread all the rules by the observance of which on the part of everybody riding on the cars would be a pleasure. For instance, instead of having a Guard bellowing 'Step Lively there' in your ear, how much pleasanter it would be to read that admonition in pretty delft tiles artifically arranged on the station walls. Then other suggestions could be put in beautiful mosaic, such as: Don't Shove; Move Forward, Please, Plenty of Seats Up in Front; Strap Hangers Must Not Hold Lighted Cigars Under the Nose of the Lady Seated in Front of Them; Keep Your Hands In Your Own Pockets; Gentlemen Will Not and Others Must Not Drop Peanut Shells on Other Passengers' Laps; If You Do Not Like the Air Stop Breathing, This Will Improve It; Keep Your Hands Off the Guard and Your Feet Off the Third Rail, Both Are Loaded; Children with Muddy Boots Will Wipe Them Upon as Few Passengers as Possible; Shopping Ladies Will Please Not Poke Their Solid Bundles into the Backs of Passengers Standing in Front of Them; Keep the Ferrule of Your Umbrella on the Floor, the Eye of a Fellow Passenger Is No Place for It; If in a Crowded Car You Cannot Find a Seat Announce In a Loud Voice That You Have Just Come from the Smallpox Hospital, Where Your Mother-in-Law Is Dying—and so on. In my opinion that is really the sort of thing they ought to do with those vacant spaces. It is primarily the business of the Subway to transport the public from one point to another as rapidly as possible, it is of secondary importance that they should be transported in comfort and the surest way to reach the latter condition is to teach people how to ride in the Subway. My plan would bring this about, and in my opinion in twenty years, the effect of its operation would be that a ride underground will become a positive pleasure."

"And what then?" said Mr. Brief. "Then may we use the walls for advertising?"

"Oh, no," said the Idiot. "It will then be the proper thime to turn the tunnel into an American Louvre."

and incidents well worth reading and talking about.

History and poetry and good novels, by which is meant not goody-goody books, but those written with a purpose, and illuminated by true art, will aid in making delightful the winter evenings at home.

Of course there are evenings when talking is preferred to reading. Before the holidays the ladies of the family are sure to be busy with embroidery and needlework, knitting and crochet. Perhaps they are dressing dolls. There is no prettier work. The little love-stitches that mother sets into the pretty frocks and petticoats of her darling's doll are the most fairy-like sewing in the mother's power, only surpassed by those she takes for the little invisible child of her love, who has not yet come to make the home of his kingdom.

Something to eat helps a home evening wonderfully. Fudge is an inspiration when a boy begins to turn furtive glances in the direction of the front door. Doughnuts and cider are as nectar and ambrosia when the clock hands points toward half past nine. Nuts and apples are great allies to the sister's plans when she is trying to fascinate an errant brother. A knack with the chafing dish and a bit of supper at an unorthodox hour have routed many an attack of the blues when people were beginning to mope. Really and truly, there is no exaggeration in saying that most people sleep best after they have had a cheerful evening and a light supper. Insomnia would flee from many a pillow if food were taken in a moderate quantity before its victim went to bed.

Fun at home is a panacea for more troubles than you think. A happy, jolly home, where love and confidence reign, sends its children out, panoplied against the wiles of the devil, as well as fortified to stand the assaults of a wicked world.

PEOPLE TALKED ABOUT

Anecdotes and Sayings from Everywhere.

REPRESENTATIVE DALTON of West Virginia says that on election day a friend of his met a darky coming from the polls at one of the precincts and asked:

"Well, Sam, what are they voting for down there?"

"Mars Thomas," answered the negro, "dis mornin' dey wuz votin fer two dollars an er half, but I don't knows what dey is votin' fer now. I specks dat I voted too soon, Mars Thomas."

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Miller Reese Hutchinson, the inventor of the acousticon, was talking one day about gout. "Gout," he said, "is very painful."

"Is it different from rheumatism?" someone asked.

"It is, indeed."

"What is the difference?"

"Well," said Mr. Hutchinson, "suppose you should take a vise, put your finger in it, and turn the screw tighter and tighter till you could bear the pain no longer. That would be rheumatism. Then suppose you should give the screw one full turn more. That would be gout."

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William James, the noted psychologist of Harvard, was illustrating the confusion into which children's minds may be thrown by the reception of different ideas about the same subject.

"Henry Ward Beecher," he said, "furnished us in his childhood with a good example of the thing I mean. On the death of Beecher's mother, the little fellow was told by someone that she had gone to heaven, and by others that she had been laid in the ground.

"He brooded over these contradictory ideas until they were reconciled in his mind. Then, one morning, he was found digging in the garden very busily.

"'What are you doing?' they asked him.

"'Why,' said the child, 'I am going to heaven to find mother.'"

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Clyde Fitch, after a long stay in Switzerland, has returned to his country house at North Coscob, Conn. He said there the other day:

"Anecdotes of Whistler are still turning up. Europe, from one end to the other, still hums with the dead American painter's name. But it was in Paris that I heard the best Whistler story.

"They told me that Whistler was in Paris at the time of the coronation of the king of England, and one evening at a reception at the Hotel Ritz a duchess said to him:

"'Do you know King Edward, Mr. Whistler?'

"'No, madame,' said the painter.

"She looked surprised.

"'Why, that is odd,' she murmured, 'I met the king at a dinner last year, and he said that he knew you.'

"'Oh,' said Whistler, 'that was only his brag.'"

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"Jim McCool was one of the oldest and best conductors on the old Richmond & Danville Air Line," says Representative Livingston of Georgia, "but he got out of the bell-cord pulling business and started a general store at West End, near Atlanta.

"It was a tough yarn, but Jim told it on himself. He said that the first Saturday he had a staving good trade and, when he closed his store for the night he put half of the cash receipts in the safe, the other half in his pockets and started for home.

"'I had not gone more than half a block before I remembered I was not working for the railroad. So I went back and put all the money in the safe.'

"Jim was given to saying, too, that he never knocked down a cent from the railroad. But, if a passenger paid cash fare, he would toss the money up. If it lodged on the bell rope it belonged to the company; if it did not it belonged down in the left hand corner of his jeans."

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Years ago the ku-klux flourished in Georgia, South Carolina and other southern states. Simply the bare mention of "ku-klux" was sufficient to make the average darky think his time had come for shuffling off this mortal coil.

One of the most laughable incidents of that reign of terror is told by a Georgia representative.

He says that Bishop Beckwith, now dead, made a visit to a portion of his diocese where there was no Episcopal church. The Methodist church was kindly loaned for the purpose of holding services. A large concourse assembled to welcome the bishop, the whites filling the interior of the building while the negroes gathered around the doors and windows.

The bishop was forced to retire to the rear of the outside of the church for the purpose of robing. Arrayed in his vestments he proceeded slowly from the rear to the front of the church.

A gust of wind caught the flowing Episcopal lawn garment and lifted it like an outstretched canopy. The darkies beheld the white apparition and gave a frantic yell of "ku-klux" and took to the woods.

It was some moments before the good bishop could reach his normal state and enter the church.

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One representative from Texas says that a German friend of his who lives in Waco was moaning the fact that his dog had a much easier time than he himself did. The German explained it in this way:

"I vish I had von goot dime likes mine dog Fritz. Dot dog he no haos droubles vhat makes him haf dose tired veelings.

"Fritz geds up in der morning und eads hes brekfast und den lays down und schleeps. I gidts ub und eads mine breakfast und goes vonce righd avay aboud mine vork. Dot dog eads his dinner und schleeps some more. I eads mine dinner and goes back to mine vork.

"Dod is der vhay ah der time. Den vhen dor dog Fritz is deat it is deat for good, und vhen I dies I god ter go ter hell yet."

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A good story comes second-hand from a representative from Massachusetts.

"I had a minister of my state tell me," he says, "that no man who has a sense of humor about him should ever think of entering the ministry, for there are times when they are sorely tried.

To illustrate this, the minister said, one day he was called on to preach the funeral of an ideerly lady who had died and whom he knew to have been a hard-hearted, bad-tempered and uncharitable old Tartar. He couldn't get out of officiating, although he realized that he could not honestly and conscientiously say anything that was good about her.

"He patched up a sort of impersonal talk and sorrowful expression, and began the services at the house. Just as he was fairly started a wogan rattled up to the door and a strentorian voice shouted 'ice!'

"The awful suggestiveness was too much for the humorously-inclined minister. He was forced to hide his face in his handkerchief to smother his grief."

For Pleasant Evenings at Home

BY MARGARET E. SANGSTER.

THE charm of winter, from the viewpoint of the home, is or ought to be conspicuous in the long evenings. Very early the darkness folds its brooding wing over the world. The hearth attracts the family with its bright glow and its cozy warmth, after a day's faring through snow and cold. Draw the curtains. Light the lamp. Open the piano. Set the easy chairs near the table. A stormy night it may be, but who cares? The gales may rave, the sleet dash against the pane, but we are at home, and there will be no company; let us have the good time at home that we have earned.

So we talk about it, and so, in this house or that, the home evening turns out a happy season of real refreshment. But not everywhere.

In homes that we know, the husband utilizes the evening when there is no company, for a long drowsy interval of slippered ease on the divan. His wife has had her busy day, too, as busy as his own in a different line of work, but he does not make a pretense of entertaining her. He stretches out, full length, with a cushion under his head and an afghan pulled down over him, and the children are told to keep quiet, lest they disturb father. Presently the room resounds with his heavy breathing. The good man snores.

Now, love a man as you may, husband, father, brother, son, he is not an interesting object when he snores on a sofa in the family room. Before long the older boys steal softly out. They have heard the whistle of comrades on the street, audible through any uproar of wind or beat of rain, and off they go. Who shall blame them? Fellows who have been cooped up in an office all day desire and require recreation in the evening. Unless home affords it they will seek it elsewhere.

The girls slip off to their rooms. They have fancy work, or a novel, or perhaps a study to occupy them there, and the wife is left alone with her drowsy lord, to mend stockings or sew on buttons or foot up her weekly accounts.

This is a true picture of many an American household. The people are honorable, straightforward and industrious. They are intensely loyal. But their homes are dull. And the unpardonable sin in home life, the jar that makes discord, is often dullness, monotonous, dreary, soul-wasting, joy-killing dullness.

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How may it be routed? To recognize a situation is the first step toward relieving it. When a home has no force other than the centrifugal, when the units fly apart and there is no pleasure in their aggregation, some great mistake has been made. In your home life, if Marie has her friends and Jasper his, and Eleanor hers, and father and mother are strangers to the friends of the young people, there is somewhere a blunder. A home should have its home interests, so deep and so sweet, that when no acquaintances call there may yet be enough to talk about and enough to enjoy. And when friends come they should belong to everybody.

The open piano counts for too little in these days. We have grown so artistic that only classical music, and only superb technique give us pleasure. If we were quite honest we would sometimes declare that we yearned for the old simple days when the daughter played and the boys sang, and everybody was happy. Somewhere lately I read of a man, widely known as a scholar and a statesman, who was persuaded to purchase a ticket for the debut of a great foreign pianist. He attended, listened with punctilious courtesy, but bore a bewildered expression through the whole magnificent musical display. Shaking his gray head when he left the hall, he confided to a lady, "My dear, it is no doubt fine, but I heard no chorus." What daddy and the children want at home are "chunes." Blessed be rag time. Welcome be coon songs. Welcome, too, the old sentimental lyrics, and the rollicking patriotic airs, and the sweet Scottish ballads, that stir the heart and the memory, and that simple folk can sing.

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A home evening should be enlivened by games. There are plenty of games that everybody can engage in, and that do not demand absorbed attention and absolute quiet. The merrier the game, the better for an evening at home.

We do not make so much as we ought of reading aloud in the evening. Will you think me a pessimist if I confess that the schools of today, in my judgment, teach very few of their students how to read. Thirty years ago—but a laughing face warns me to take another tack. Yet, as I don't like being silenced, I will just whisper that mamma is a better reader than Louise, who has a Vassar or Smith diploma, and that grandmamma is very likely a better reader than mamma.

To read aloud, so pleasantly that the reading is interpretation, is a real accomplishment. There is something, too, in the choice of books. Not every book lends itself to the purpose of reading in the home circle. Some books are for one's private ear and eye. Others are gracious and await an audience. The evenings of a winter ought not to be wasted over reading that awakes no discussion, and enriches no memory. Suppose a home to awaken to its privileges in this regard. It will then deny itself if need be some superfluous luxuries, and will have as regular visitants certain favorite periodicals and newspapers. The best authors of the day are contributing articles and essays to the weekly and monthly magazine literature of the age, and in a cultured home there must be familiarity with what they are saying and doing.

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Immense strides are making in science, in invention, in discovery. A home should not be ignorant of what is going on. The whole outlook has changed in those appliances which make home life easy and convenient; in surgery, and in the treatment of disease. Home evenings are not spent foolishly when they give a chance to those beneath the roof to know intelligently, the order and the progress of current events.

At the moment there are opportunities for learning a great deal that is entertaining about our own history, and the books that epitomize it are excellent for reading aloud. Inquire at any library for the recently published lives and recollections of men and women who passed through the period of our civil war. There is a shelf full of such volumes in every free library, and they are crammed with episodes